

House Bill 364
February 19, 2007
Presented by Chris Smith
House Appropriations Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Chief of Staff of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

The proposed Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program is the culmination of discussions that stem back to the recommendations of the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council, appointed by Governor Racicot in 2000. The council recommended that, as part of Montana's wolf management plan, there should be a program to reduce the risk of livestock losses to wolves and to reimburse producers for confirmed or probable losses. FWP included this recommendation in the selected alternative in the final EIS and State Wolf Management Plan. Over the past 18 to 20 months, a working group with a broad range of interests developed the details for Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program established in House Bill 364.

Importantly, the council recommended that the program should not be funded with hunting and fishing license dollars or matching federal funds provided for wildlife management. The council recommended funding for the program should come from either the general federal treasury – because the restoration of wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains was a national priority under the Endangered Species Act – or from private donations. The more recent working group expanded the potential scope of funding to include state appropriations, if authorized by the legislature.

FWP committed to seek federal appropriations specifically for the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program, in addition to the funding we receive for wolf management. We have both written to and spoken with the Montana delegation on this matter, but to date we have not received word that federal funds have been appropriated. We will continue to pursue funds as the federal budget process moves forward.